

Anti-Imperialist Viewpoint

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To what degree is the situation of the Latin American republics similar to that of the semi-colonial countries? The economic condition of these republics is undoubtedly semi-colonial, and this characteristic of their economies tends to be accentuated as capitalism, and therefore imperialist penetration, develops. But the national bourgeoisies, who see cooperation with imperialism as their best source of profits, feel themselves secure enough as mistresses of power not to be too greatly preoccupied with national sovereignty. The South American bourgeoisies, not yet facing Yankee military occupation (with the exception of Panama), are not disposed to admit the necessity of struggling for their second independence, as *Aprista*¹ propaganda naively supposes. The state, or better yet the ruling class, does not seem to feel the need for a greater or more secure degree of national autonomy. The revolution for independence is relatively too near, its myths and symbols too alive in the consciousness of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. The illusion of national sovereignty still lives on. It would be a serious mistake to claim that this social layer still has a sense of revolutionary nationalism, as in those places where it does represent a factor for anti-imperialist struggle in semi-colonial countries enslaved by imperialism, for example, in Asia in recent decades.

Over a year ago, in our discussion with Aprista leaders in which we rejected their desire to propose the creation of a Latin American Kuomintang², we put forward the following thesis as a way to avoid Eurocentric plagiarism and to

accommodate our revolutionary activity to a precise appreciation of our own reality:

Collaboration with the bourgeoisie and even many feudal elements in the anti-imperialist struggle in China are explicable in terms of race and national culture that are not relevant for us. A Chinese nobleman or bourgeois feels himself Chinese to the core. He matches the white man's contempt for his stratified and decrepit culture with his own contempt and pride in his millennia-long tradition. Anti-imperialism can therefore find support in such sentiments and in a sense of Chinese nationalism. Circumstances are not the same in Indo-America. The native aristocracy and bourgeoisie feel no solidarity with the people in possessing a common history and culture. In Peru, the white aristocrat and bourgeois scorn the popular and the national. They consider themselves white above all else. The petty-bourgeois mestizo imitates their example. The Lima bourgeoisie fraternizes with the Yankee capitalists, even with their mere employees at the Country Club, the Tennis Club, and in the streets. The Yankee can marry the native senorita without the inconvenience of differences in race or religion, and she feels no national or cultural misgivings in preferring marriage with a member of the invading race. The middle-class girl has no qualms in this regard, either. The girl who can trap a Yankee employed by the Grace Company or the Foundation does it with the satisfaction of thereby raising her social position. The nationalist factor for these inescapable objective reasons is neither decisive nor basic to the anti-imperialist struggle in our environment. Only in countries such as Argentina, where there is a large and rich bourgeoisie proud of their country's wealth and power, and where the national character for this reason has clearer contours than in more backward countries, could anti-imperialism (perhaps) penetrate more easily among bourgeois elements. But this is for reasons related to

capitalist expansion and development, rather than for reasons of social justice and socialist theory as in our case.

The betrayal by the Chinese bourgeoisie and the failure of the Kuomintang have not yet been understood in their full magnitude. Their capitalist style of nationalism (one not related to social justice or theory) demonstrates how little we can trust the revolutionary nationalist sentiments of the bourgeoisie, even in countries like China.

As long as the imperialists are able to "manage" the sentiments and formalities of these states' national sovereignty and are not forced to resort to armed intervention or military occupation, they can definitively count on the collaboration of their bourgeoisies. While they may depend upon the imperialist economy, these countries, or rather their bourgeoisies, consider themselves as much the masters of their own fate as Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, and the other "dependent states" of Europe.

This factor of political psychology should not be discounted in the precise estimation of the possibilities of anti-imperialist action in Latin America. Neglect of this matter has been one of the characteristics of Aprista theory.

The fundamental difference between us in Peru who originally accepted the APRA (as a project for a united front, never as a party or even as an effective organizer of struggle), and those outside Peru who later defined it as a Latin American Kuomintang, is that the former remain faithful to the revolutionary, socioeconomic conception of anti-imperialism; the latter, meanwhile, explain their position by saying: "We are leftists (or socialists) because we are anti-imperialists." Anti-imperialism thereby is raised to the level of a program, a political attitude, a movement that is valid in and of itself and that leads spontaneously to

socialism, to the social revolution (how, we have no idea). This idea inordinately overestimates the anti-imperialist movement, exaggerates the myth of the struggle for a "second independence," and romanticizes that we are already living in the era of a new emancipation. This leads to the idea of replacing the anti-imperialist leagues with political parties. From an APRA initially conceived as a united front, a popular alliance, a bloc of oppressed classes, we pass to an APRA defined as the Latin American Kuomintang.

For us, anti-imperialism does not and cannot constitute, by itself, a political program for a mass movement capable of conquering state power. Anti-imperialism, even if it could mobilize the nationalist bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie on the side of the worker and peasant masses (and we have already definitively denied this possibility), does not annul class antagonisms nor suppress different class interests.

Neither the bourgeoisie nor the petty bourgeoisie in power can carry out anti-imperialist politics. To demonstrate this, we have the experience of Mexico, where the petty bourgeoisie has just allied with Yankee imperialism. In its relations with the United States, a "nationalist" government might use different language than the Leguia government of Peru. This government is clearly, unabashedly Pan-Americanist and Monroeist. But any other bourgeois government would carry out the same practical policies on loans and concessions. Foreign capital investment in Peru grows in direct and close relation to the country's economic development, the exploitation of its natural riches, its population, and the improvement of its routes of communication. How can the most demagogic petty bourgeois oppose this capitalist penetration? With nothing but words; with nothing but a quick, nationalist fix. The taking of power by anti-imperialism, if it were possible,

would not represent the taking of power by the proletarian masses, by socialism. The socialist revolution will find its most bloody and dangerous enemy (dangerous because of their confusionism and demagoguery) in those petty bourgeois placed in power by the voices of order.

Without ruling out the use of any type of anti-imperialist agitation or any action to mobilize those social sectors that might eventually join the struggle, our mission is to explain to and show the masses that only the socialist revolution can stand as a definitive and real barrier to the advance of imperialism.

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These factors differentiate the situation of the South American countries from that of the Central American nations. There, Yankee imperialism, by resorting to armed intervention without the slightest hesitation, does provoke a patriotic reaction that could easily win a part of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie to an anti-imperialist perspective. Aprista propaganda, conducted personally by Haya de la Torre, has obtained better results here than in any other part of America. His confusionist and messianic perorations, which claim to be related to the economic struggle, actually appeal to racial and emotional factors, thereby meeting the necessary conditions for impressing the petty-bourgeois intellectual. Class parties and powerful, clearly class-conscious union organizations are not destined for the same quick growth here as in South America. In our countries, the class factor is more decisive and more developed. There is no reason to resort to vague populist formulas behind which reactionary tendencies can only prosper. At the moment, *Aprismo*, as propaganda, is limited to Central America; in South America, it is being totally liquidated, a consequence of the populist, "bossist," and

petty-bourgeois deviation that sees it as a Latin American Kuomintang. The next Anti-Imperialist Congress in Paris, which will have to unify the anti-imperialist organizations and distinguish between anti-imperialist programs and agitation and the tasks of class parties and trade unions, will put an absolute end to this question.

Do the interests of imperialist capitalism necessarily and inevitably coincide with the feudal and semi-feudal interests of our countries' land-owning classes? Is the struggle against feudalism unavoidably and completely identical with the anti-imperialist struggle? Certainly, imperialist capitalism uses the power of the feudal class to the degree that it considers it the politically dominant class. But their economic interests are not the same. The petty bourgeoisie, even the most demagogic, can end up in the same intimate alliance with imperialist capitalism if it, in practice, dilutes its most conspicuous nationalist impulses. Finance capital would feel more secure if power were in the hands of a larger social class that is in a better position than the old, hated feudal class to defend the interests of capitalism and serve as its guard and water boy by satisfying certain overdue demands and distorting the masses' class orientation. The creation of a class of smallholders, the expropriation of the *latifundia*, and the liquidation of feudal privileges are not in opposition to the interests of imperialism in an immediate sense. On the contrary, to the degree that feudal vestiges still remain despite the growth of the capitalist economy, the movement for the liquidation of feudal privileges coincides with the interests of capitalist development as promoted by imperialist experts and investments. The disappearance of the large *latifundia*, the creation of an agrarian economy through what bourgeois demagoguery calls the "democratization" of the land, the displacement of the old aristocracies by a more powerful bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie better able to guarantee social peace: none of

this is contrary to imperialist interests. The Leguia regime in Peru, as timid as it has been in regard to the interests of the *latifundistas*³ and *gamonales* (who support it to a great degree), has no problem resorting to demagoguery, declaiming against feudalism and feudal privilege, thundering against the old oligarchies, and promoting a program of land distribution to make every field worker a small landowner. *Leguismo* draws its greatest strength from precisely this type of demagoguery. *Legitimismo* does not dare lay a hand on the large landowners. But the natural direction of capitalist development—irrigation works, the exploitation of new mines, etc. is in contradiction to the interests and privileges of feudalism. To the degree that the amount of cultivated land increases and new centers of employment appear, the *latifundistas* lose their principal power: the absolute and unconditional control of labor. In Lambayeque, where a water diversion project has been started by the American engineer Sutton, the technical commission has already run up against the interests of the large feudal landowners. These landowners grow mainly sugar. The threat that they will lose their monopoly of land and water, and thereby their means of controlling the work force, infuriates these people and pushes them toward attitudes that the government considers subversive, no matter how closely it is connected to these elements. Sutton has all the characteristics of the North American capitalist businessman. His outlook and his work clash with the feudal spirit of the *latifundistas*. For example, Sutton has established a system of water distribution that is based on the principle that these resources belong to the state; the *latifundistas* believe that water rights are part of their right to the land. By this theory, the water was theirs; it was and is the absolute property of their estates.

And is the petty bourgeoisie, whose role in the struggle against imperialism is so often overestimated, necessarily opposed to imperialist penetration because of economic exploitation? The petty bourgeoisie is undoubtedly the social class most sensitive to the fascination of nationalist mythology. But the economic factor which predominates is the following: in countries afflicted with Spanish-style poverty, where the petty bourgeoisie, locked in decades-old prejudice, resists proletarianization; where, because of their miserable wages, they do not have the economic power to partially transform themselves into a working class; where the desperate search for office employment, a petty government job, and the hunt for a "decent" salary and a "decent" job dominate, the creation of large enterprises that represent better-paid jobs, even if they enormously exploit their local employees, is favorably received by the middle classes. A Yankee business represents a better salary, possibilities for advancement, and liberation from dependence on the state, which can only offer a future to speculators. This reality weighs decisively on the consciousness of the petty bourgeois looking for or in possession of a position. In these countries with Spanish-style poverty, we repeat, the situation of the middle classes is not the same as in those countries where these classes have gone through a period of free competition and of capitalist development favorable to individual initiative and success and to oppression by the giant monopolies.

In conclusion, we are anti-imperialists because we are Marxists, because we are revolutionaries, because we oppose capitalism with socialism, an antagonistic system called upon to transcend it, and because in our struggle against foreign imperialism we are fulfilling our duty of solidarity with the revolutionary masses of Europe.

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<https://www.marxists.org/archive/mariateg/works/1929-ai.htm>

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1. Refers to the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA, or simply Aprista), an attempted international network of "anti-imperialist" movements and organizations throughout Latin America, founded in 1924 by its longtime leader Victor Raul Haya de la Torre. Exists today as the Peruvian Aprista Party [Editors note].↵
 2. Kuomintang; referred to in English as the Chinese Nationalist Party, or KMT, the second major political force in China at the time, alongside the Communist Party of China. Ostensibly an "anti-imperialist" party, inasmuch as it demanded renegotiations of the Unequal Treaties imposed onto China by Western Powers in the late Qing Dynasty. Served as an inspiration/model for Aprista leaders [Editors note].↵
 3. The owner of a great estate, or latifundio [Editors note].↵